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"Where do you summer?"

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“Where do you summer?”

Through my senior project, I observe the historic stereotypes of the wealthy. Additionally, I investigate the way in which commerce capitalizes on the aspirations of many to identify with this small group. Architecture and apparel are the main subjects that I use in exploring this relationship.

Though it is not always a conscious process, our personal esthetic choices are often used to portray the lifestyle we have, or the lifestyle we want. A man wearing a suit may do so to signify that he doesn't perform manual labor, while a man wearing flannel and denim may do so to be protected from the elements. Wealthy urbanites come to the Hudson Valley in the fall and spring wearing flannel purchased at expensive boutiques to embody an “outdoorsy” persona. Teenagers in Midwestern exurbs wear pastel oxford shirts to identify with old-money elites of the east coast. Similarly, one often finds paneling in an office or study to conjure images of the architecture of elite places of learning, while a rural cabin may be bedecked in unfinished wood siding to portray closeness to its natural surroundings. While materials and elements in clothing and architecture are signifiers of class, styles seep back and forth across large swaths of the American populace, often losing their original class signatures.

In my work I have deconstructed garments and adhered them to architectural elements, where they lose their human form. This shifts focus away from the person wearing the garment, and towards what the garment itself is signifying in conjunction with the architectural element with which it is joined. The textiles which are tightly adhered to the flat architectural surfaces emphasize the way in which clothing can act as a façade which provides some information in that same way that bricks or cladding do for a building. Interior and exterior architectural elements are both used and interspersed amongst each other within the installation, reflecting the complicated and unclear relationship between the identities we present, and the elements of our identity we are less inclined to share.

Throughout my project, it was important to me to use colors that mimicked the colors we often find in men's apparel. In the wainscoting piece, I used charcoals, greys, and camels, which are often seen in men's suiting, along with reds and burgundies. These somber, muted greys connote professionalism and seriousness that one associates with “desk jobs.” However, like a red tie worn with a black suit, red and burgundy punctuates the piece, and symbolizes the authority one desires to demand by wearing a suit. The exuberant pinks and pastel greens and creams used in the siding and other pieces are taken from the apparel of leisure. These colors make us think of the “preppy” lifestyle of summers spent by the seashore, a luxury that is desired by many. Finally, the burgundies and dark greens of the entrance of the room, are the colors of outdoorsmen, and those who like to vacation in the outdoors.

In my senior project, I have used a fusion of architecture and apparel to explore a common desire to emulate the wealthy and elite in our culture. In a time in our history when class division and income inequality are central to the problems facing the country, I believe my work highlights a pervasive subconscious need held by many to identify oneself with this group.